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My Note Book.

Leonato.—Are these things spoken, or do I but dream?
Don John.—Sir, they are spoken, and these things are true.
—Much Ado About Nothing.



HAT has become of that Art Commission appointed by the President several months ago to supervise—if I remember correctly its functions—the purchases by the Government of works of art? If ever there was a case demanding its attention it is surely suggested in a recent Washington despatch to *The New York World*, concerning the introduction, by Senator Voorhees, of a bill to purchase “for a sum not exceeding \$15,000” a portrait of Abraham Lincoln, by “G. W. Travis, of Frankfort-on-the-Main, the son of a portrait painter of local renown in Germany.” It appears that during the civil war young Travis came to New York to enter the Union service, and, disappointed at failing to pass the examination board on account of delicate health, he aspired to distinction by painting the portrait of Lincoln. He stopped the President on the street one day in Washington, and telling his story, begged for a sitting, which was good-naturedly granted.

“Several other sittings were given, and the picture was finished in the artist’s studio at Frankfort-on-the-Main two months after the assassination of Lincoln. United States Consul Webster saw the picture, was astonished at the accuracy of the likeness, and purchased it. The painting remained in the consulate until the spring of 1876, when Mr. Webster sent it, with other paintings, to the Centennial Exposition, where it attracted much attention. There Mrs. Lincoln saw it for the first time, and coming upon it suddenly fainted and fell to the floor. Upon the death of Mr. Webster the picture came into the possession of its present owner, Mr. Charles W. Hayes, of Washington.”

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OF the merits of the picture I know nothing, except the negative fact that they were not sufficient to attract my attention at the Centennial Exposition, although I was a frequent visitor there. Nor do I know any one who remembers the picture. The story about Mrs. Lincoln fainting when she saw it may be true. She may have fainted because the likeness was strikingly good or because it was atrociously bad. Mrs. Custer, I know, nearly fainted when she saw the effigy perpetrated by the sculptor Macdonald of her noble husband. The picture of Lincoln may be good as a likeness and yet worthless as a work of art, and this is probably the case. Certainly the painter is absolutely unknown, and it is unlikely that the value of the picture is even a tenth of \$15,000. The case calls for careful scrutiny from the artistic as well as the pecuniary side, and it is to be hoped that the Art Commission will look into it.

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THE portrait in question, as I have intimated, even by an inferior painter, might be, if a likeness with character and expression, an invaluable gift to posterity—supposing that there were not already several good portraits of Lincoln. It happens, though, that the features of no man of his time have been more frequently and—owing doubtless to his marked physiognomy—more successfully reproduced. A good portrait of Lincoln, therefore, is not such a rarity that Congress need pay a fancy price for this one, which, it appears, was after all only partly painted from life.

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ONE of these days, however, this Government will probably consider the propriety of forming a National Portrait Gallery like that in London. It could then afford to pay liberally, even extravagantly, for rare portraits of illustrious Americans who departed this life before the days of the daguerrotype. Fugitive as was that earliest form of the photographic portrait, it marks the beginning of the period when the features of every man, woman and child are left for posterity—if posterity should happen to want them. The “cabinet” photograph, which, with the “carte de visite” of the passing generation, is now conveniently kept, detachable, in an “album,” is from its very portability reasonably safe from destruction. If our grandparents in the old-fashioned garb of their day offend our fastidious taste, at least we are not called upon to “live with” them on our walls as our ancestors used to live with their grandparents, until, as Horace Walpole tells us—even in his century—“portraits that cost twenty, thirty, sixty guineas, and that proudly take possession of the drawing-

room, give way in the next generation to those of the new-married couple, descending into the parlor, where they are slightly mentioned as ‘my father’s and mother’s pictures.’ When they become ‘my grandfather and grandmother,’ they mount to the two pair of stairs; and then, unless despatched to the mansion-house in the country, or crowded into the housekeeper’s room, they perish among the lumber of garrets, or flutter in rags before a broker’s shop in the Seven Dials.”

* * *

NOWADAYS in America, however, most of us are much too proud of having ancestors to put them away in the garret. It is Holmes, I think, who talks of the respectability attained by the possession of “three generations in oils.” However this may be, a good contemporaneous oil portrait is an excellent thing even in the teeth of photography, which, by the way, acts as a sort of check on the painter, warning him not to flatter too outrageously. With such a deterring influence, miniatures like those by Cosway, Isabey, and their contemporaries, which have come down to us, might have been less insipid from the zeal to make the sitters so uniformly beautiful. The camera, as we all know, frequently fails to do us justice, and cannot be relied on to transmit our features to posterity. Photographs are seldom artistically satisfactory, but sometimes they are invaluable as “documents.” An oil portrait, however, in the present day, unless artistically painted, has no value and ought to be destroyed. You see, I do not go so far as Walpole in deploring the fate of the average family portrait, though, to be sure, such a loss now is apt to be of less consequence than in Walpole’s day, when it might have involved the destruction of the only authentic picture of some posthumous celebrity. Mere posthumous celebrity is barely possible now, when every person with even the ghost of an idea is put on the rack and made to yield it to the ubiquitous interviewer.

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AS for the persons of our day already famous, by all means let us have good portraits of them in oils. Mr. George W. Childs set an admirable example to other wealthy Americans in authorizing Generals Sherman and Sheridan to select, at his expense, artists to paint their portraits, to be hung in Grant Hall, at West Point, beside that of General Grant, which he has already presented and placed in the new building. That was more than a year ago, and I have not heard that either Sherman or Sheridan availed himself of Mr. Childs’ generous offer. Those awful words “Too late!” seem to rise from the new-made grave of the hero of Winchester. And now with Grant, McClellan, Logan, Burnside, Hancock and Kirkpatrick—with Sheridan added, alas!—all gone to join the brave host which preceded them on the field of battle, the statuesque figure of rugged, serene old Sherman stands alone to represent the leaders in the gigantic struggle for the preservation of the Union. Let us hope that Mr. Childs will prevail on the general to sit without delay. I have heard that old “Tecumseh” is averse to posing for an artist. But should he prove refractory, let Mr. Childs call to mind the case of Montesquieu. That great Frenchman, he will remember, for a long time declined to be painted, but at last he was induced to sit to Dassier, on the artist using the argument, “Do you not think that there is as much pride in refusing my offer as in accepting it?”

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AS was shown recently in these columns, the distinguished French artist, Benjamin Constant, who is soon to visit our shores, has decided views of his own, and does not hesitate to express them. More interesting, and more reasonable, perhaps, than his insistence that Géricault or Delacroix might have been proud to sign several of the pen-and-ink phantasies left behind by Victor Hugo, are his views on the present tendencies of painting in France. With his own Eastern love of rich and warm tones, it is easy to understand that he cannot admit that color may be obtained with cool grays and blues, and that such color may be nearer that of Northern nature than his own more gorgeous harmonies. “This manner of seeing exasperates me,” he remarked to Mr. Eudel. “It is nothing but a fashion. It would seem that these people love but colorlessness, bloodlessness, sickness and death. To-day, for a picture to be admired, it must look as though it were painted in the rain or fog, under gloomy skies, in a dirty atmosphere. Upon my word, I shall end by believing in contagion in maladies of art as well as in cases of cholera and smallpox. Pessimism, which has little by little invaded our

literature, has infiltrated into our tubes, made its way into our color-boxes, and displays itself on our palettes. Our artists see things black and paint them gray. Naturally, the public has followed like the sheep of Panurge. So that, now, if a painter has the audacity to put a touch of red on his canvas, the Jeremiahs of the Salon raise their arms to heaven, make the sign of the cross, cover their heads with ashes, and talk of paintings manufactured for export. Fashion has decreed that red is not ‘distinguished.’ And yet, taking at hazard three French painters whose talent is not and cannot be disputed, we have Watteau in his ‘Departure for Cythera,’ Delacroix in his ‘Entry of the Crusaders,’ and Millet in the ‘Angelus.’ Do I speak without proof? Are these works pale, cold and colorless? Do they look like the painting of a consumptive invalid? I will fight against this invasion of anæmia,” he exclaims. “I love splendor, sunlight, life. Like my masters Rubens, Veronese, Velasquez, it is red blood and not ditch water that I try to put under the skin of my subjects. If I wish to paint a Theodora, it is certainly not a consumptive that I take for a model. What, can you tell me, are those twilight landscapists after? Is nature pale? are the flowers afflicted with chlorosis? Are the trees in need of a course of wine of iron? They talk of fine tones, of subdued half tints, of harmonious grays! Rubbish! The values in these grays are chance mixtures of a badly cleaned palette and nothing more! At the Louvre I keep away from certain galleries, so as to avoid getting a cold in the head. David’s pictures keep the air at a temperature of ten degrees below zero. Even in August you feel like turning up the collar of your coat. But stand in the Salle Carrée before the ‘Marriage of Cana!’ Then you breathe again. The presence of that marvellous painting acts on one like a ray of genius. Ah! what a Titan was that Veronese; and how foolish the young fellows are who cannot go and admire him at Venice, not, at least, to study him in Paris! But why speak of Italy. In France, too, are not the most illustrious of our contemporaries colorists? Ribot, Henner, Laurens, Baudry, Vollon!”

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“AND Ingres and Puvis de Chavannes?” Mr. Eudel interrupted. “Oh! Puvis de Chavannes,” replied Mr. Constant, “is, sure enough, a master. He is an artist and a poet of an elevated style. No one is greater in landscape design. We are not on the same road; nevertheless, I take great pleasure in his works, even when they are the most opposed to my temperament. Puvis has done some wonderfully decorative things in grays; but he is above and beyond all, merely, in fact, a decorator. To the corpses of the ‘Bellum-Concordia’ compare those of Raphael. Those of the Italian master are equally colorless, I will agree. But what admirable drawing! Besides, Raphael knew how to transform himself. When he put fresco aside for portraiture, he quitted his flat tints, his wilful colorlessness, and became a painter with a powerful and true sense of color.”

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“STILL, when one’s work is framed in stone, that necessitates a conventional art and a special technique,” Mr. Eudel urged. “I don’t say otherwise,” Mr. Constant replied. “But for my part my dream would be to attempt the decoration of gilded vaults. Do you remember the Apollo of the Louvre, Delacroix’s chef-d’œuvre, perhaps—at any rate, one of the most marvellous bits of painting by no matter whom? Recollect how it keeps its place and absolutely shines in the midst of the dazzle and glitter of the Apollo gallery. Do you know that I have an important commission for the Sorbonne? Well, I swear I will not cover my wall with gray tones. My aim shall be to work fair and luminous, like Veronese. The critics, of course, will not find my work ‘full of emotion, sympathetic, subjective.’ Well, what do I care? If they would send the writers who talk this empty cant to roast as I did in Morocco, in Tunis or at Cairo, and paint a torso in the open air at a temperature of ninety degrees, they would forget their creeds without faith and their sterile discussions.”

* * *

BRAVO! Mr. Constant! you talk like a master who has the courage of his opinions. We know you well in the United States as a brilliant colorist, a decorative painter of rare power, and listen with respect to what you say as such. But you are to come to us to paint portraits—the portraits of certain favored Americans, who are on no account to exceed six in number, it is given out. Well, well! we shall see what we shall see.

MANY instances have been given recently in these columns showing the profit of collecting when purchases are made with knowledge and judgment, but in the annals of the picture market there has been hardly anything to surpass the case of Troyon's "Water-Cart," or "Le Bac," as this famous canvas is generally called. Painted in 1856, it was bought originally for \$200, and at the Bolckord sale, as already stated, Agnew paid for it 2000 guineas (\$10,500). Notwithstanding the numerous good investments in "old masters," there seems to be much more risk in buying them on speculation than in buying works of modern painters. Their market value not only is more affected than the latter by the caprice of fashion, but the question of authenticity is often an important factor in the estimation. At the recent sale, for instance, of the Gatton Park pictures—the collection of the late Lord Monson—the well-known "Vierge au bas-relief," no longer believed to be by Da Vinci, brought only 2100 guineas (\$11,025) against the £4000 (\$20,000) Lord Monson paid for it. This is a different case altogether from that of Rubens's "Daniel in the Lion's Den," which Mr. Beckett-Denison bought at the Hamilton sale for 4009 guineas, and which, at his death, three years later, was bought back by the Duke at 2000 guineas. Mr. Beckett-Denison was notoriously a reckless bidder. The loss on the "Vierge au bas-relief" was due chiefly to the present opinion of experts as to its authorship, it being thought now that it was painted by Cesaro da Sesto, a pupil of Da Vinci—the probable painter, by the way, as I think was proved in these columns some years ago, of the Kellogg "Da Vinci," which is, or was in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

It is well to talk of the profit of collecting; but collecting to be profitable must be practised with more discretion than is usually shown by American picture-buyers. This is, of course, the more necessary when the collector aspires to own paintings by great masters. Such is the ambition of the railroad millionaire, Mr. C. P. Huntington; but if that gentleman goes about his railroad business with as little judgment as he makes his picture purchases, it is a wonder that he has not long since come to grief. This much, judging from his purchases at a single sale—that of the rather poor Graves collection. It may be remembered that he paid \$10,100 for an alleged "Corot" (No. 195)—an interesting and well-painted picture, but Corot certainly never painted it, and he probably never saw it—and \$5100 for a Rousseau (No. 166), catalogued "Sunset at d'Arbonne" (sic), which had been worked over by an alien hand in almost every part of it since it left Rousseau's studio fifteen years ago. Recently, looking over a portfolio of etchings belonging to Mr. Durand-Ruel, I came upon a print of the picture engraved for him in 1873 from the original then in his possession, and I was able to compare it with the photographic reproduction made by Kurtz about a year ago for the catalogue of the Graves sale. Mr. Durand-Ruel remembered the picture perfectly as it was when he had owned it, and when he saw it last winter at the Union League Club it made him shudder. In more than one place the composition had been altered, evidently with a view to making a more salable picture: it had left the master's easel in what the average buyer would consider an unfinished condition. The correct title of the picture, by the way, is "Soleil Couchant (lande d'Arbonne)."

THE proceeds of the recent Londesborough sale in London amounted to \$133,230. The dispersion of the collection of arms and armor should have been interesting to our New York connoisseur, Mr. Morrisini, whose name is not to be found among those who divided the spoil. Our Mr. Riggs, however, captured at least one veritable prize. Among the principal buyers were Mr. Frederick Spitzer and Mr. Stephen Bourgeois. The former enriched his fine collection with a pair of steel gauntlets of the sixteenth century, at the cost of \$500, and several other pieces of ancient armor, among which is a shield in stamped leather, which had been in Horace Walpole's collection at Strawberry Hill, and which cost its present owner \$2257. A cutlass damascened in gold with a scene representing the siege of Boulogne in 1513, and which is said to have belonged to Henry VIII., went to Mr. Bourgeois for \$657. He paid \$1050 for an executioner's sword, the blade engraved with flowers and bearing a Gothic inscription; \$1391 for an incomplete suit of armor, beautifully engraved with figures of saints and the like; \$1131 for a rapier made by Heinrich Dinger; \$1654 for a poniard with ornaments in niello;

\$840 for a saddle-plaque in steel, with incrustations of gold and silver. Mr. Whitehead bought for the South Kensington Museum a French rapier of the sixteenth century ornamented with figures of the judgment of Solomon, the death of Abel, Judith with Holofernes' head, and several others for \$404; a pair of steel gauntlets, Spanish work of the sixteenth century, for \$917; a Milanese morion in repoussé steel for \$500 and an ivory comb from the Bernal Collection for \$525. Mr. Falcke got for \$1575 an executioner's sword of the fifteenth century, formerly in the Bernal Collection; Mr. Riggs, a pair of gauntlets with the emblems of Henry VIII. for \$1313; Mr. Coureau, an arquebuse of the sixteenth century, which had been in the famous Debruge Collection, for \$1050, and a complete suit of Italian armor, dated 1550, for \$5250; Mr. Frankenheim, an iron mace which had belonged to Edward IV., for \$735; Mr. Currie, a pair of gauntlets damascened in gold with a figure of Mars and trophies of arms in repoussé, for \$2888, and Mr. Brett, a pair of pistols by Domenico Bonomino, richly chiselled with the "labors of Hercules" in high relief, for \$510.

THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER has again changed hands. It has had now, I think, six successive owners in about the same number of years. The Sheriff sold out the office effects for a few hundred dollars to satisfy the paper-dealer's claim, and, later, the subscription books and copyright were knocked down for \$1175 to a creditor who, in conjunction with the printer, who is also a creditor, hopes to continue the publication.

IN The Magazine of Art for August, Sir John Millais jots down some suggestive "Thoughts of Our Art of To-day." The "Our," of course, refers to England. He starts out with the emphatic opinion that "the best art of modern times is as good as any of its kind that has gone before," and, furthermore, that "the best art of England can hold its own against the world." However much the first proposition may set us thinking, it is certain that the latter one will be disputed at once by every art student outside of Sir John's own nationality. The complacency with which certain English painters regard the art of their country to-day would be inexplicable but for the fact that their work is held in quite inordinate esteem among their countrymen, to whom they sell their pictures, at enormous prices, as fast as they can paint them. England would seem, indeed, a Paradise for bad painters—that is to say, for bad painters who are not of what is vaguely called there "the French school." By the way, Sir John speaks also of "our English school of painting." That is something vaguer still. Who compose it, I wonder? Let us take the leading painters in England, to-day: Alma Tadema is a Dutchman; Huber Herkomer is a Bavarian; J. L. Sargent, who took the Chantrey Bequest prize, is an American; James McNeill Whistler, ex-President of a British water society, is an American; Mark Fisher is an American; George H. Boughton is virtually one. Burne-Jones—a veritable poet of mediævalism—is undoubtedly an Englishman, but he holds aloof from the Royal Academy, with whose methods he has no sympathy. He and George F. Watts, who is also out of accord with Burlington House, stand alone as imaginative painters of England. Even they are opposed in methods. There is Sir Frederick Leighton, who represents the perfection of the academical graces—an English Cabanel, or, shall I say, an English Bouguereau? It will hardly be claimed that Sir Frederick and his followers, or, rather, imitators, represent an "English school of painting." If such should be the case, I suppose that Edwin Long would be the chief apostle. Does the reader know of Mr. Long? He is a Royal Academician, gets as much as \$10,000 for a canvas, and I suppose Sir John Millais would have to concede him to be an important man. I should think, though, Sir John might hesitate to declare him a representative of "the best art of England" which "can hold its own against the world."

THERE is one point in Sir John's article, however, where his views accord completely with those of Benjamin Constant—although I am sure he would disapprove very strongly of most of Mr. Constant's pictures—and that is on behalf of a palette of bright colors. "The great artists," he says, "all painted in *bright* colors, such as it is the fashion nowadays to decry as crude and vulgar, never suspecting that what they applaud in those works is merely the result of what they condemn in their contemporaries. Take a case in point—the 'Bacchus and Ariadne,' in the National Gallery,

with its splendid red robe and its rich brown grass. You may rest assured that the painter of that bright red robe never painted the grass brown. He saw the color as it was, and painted it as it was—distinctly green; only it has faded with time to its present beautiful mellow color. Yet many men nowadays will not have a picture with green in it; there are even buyers who, when giving a commission to an artist, will stipulate that the canvas shall contain none of it. But God Almighty has given us green, and you may depend upon it it's a fine color."

DOES not this sound almost like an echo of the language of Benjamin Constant quoted just now? I do not think, though, that outside Philistine England, any picture-buyer, in giving an artist a commission, ever stipulated that the canvas should contain no green. Sir John Millais continues, as follows:

"There is, and has been for a century or so, this growing cry for 'subdued color;' and what is the result? The case of Sir Joshua Reynolds is a sufficiently notorious example. It was his custom—well knowing what he did—to paint in clear and true colors. We have it from Walpole, after a visit to Reynolds's studio, that he found the Waldegrave picture, which now commands so much admiration for its mellowness of tone, 'dreadfully white and pinky.' But Sir George Beaumont, the connoisseurs and patrons, were forever urging him to give them in his pictures what time alone can effect: 'tone—like the old masters.' And at length, to satisfy their reiterated demands, he made use of the pigment that would most readily give the rich soft brown they wanted—asphaltum. And now every picture that contains that villainous color is in every stage of decomposition and ruin, and the chief responsibility for that lies heavily on his critics."

"TIME and varnish," Sir John says truly, "are two of the greatest of old masters." It is amusing to hear the rubbish talked about "the golden atmosphere" of a Rembrandt, and about a Cuyt "swimming in golden sunshine." I think that Merritt, the picture-restorer (who became the husband of our clever countrywoman, Anna Lea, and developed her talent as a painter) was the first to expose this cant about "mellowness" and "tone," qualities in a picture which were supposed to have been painting secrets which died with the old masters. He wrote a series of admirable articles on the subject in The Athenæum, replete with expert knowledge, and convincing to all fair-minded readers, I should think, of the reasonableness of the theory now iterated by Sir John Millais.

ALLUSION was made in The Art Amateur last month to the flimsy character of most of the inlaid Dutch tables and cabinets, which, in consequence of the change of climate, soon fall to pieces after coming to our shores. But this furniture is substantial and trustworthy compared with most of the "old English" furniture made in this country for certain dealers in "antiques." A "solid, old English oak table" of this kind, bought not a hundred miles from a corner of Broadway near Union Square, at a cost of nearly \$300 I am told, was recently sent to a gentleman at Narragansett Pier, where the sea air warped it almost beyond recognition before he had time to pay for it—which, by the way, he is not anxious to do now. One would really suppose that, if from even no other motive than that of policy, established dealers in old furniture would hesitate to impose on the public with their mock "antiques," the nature of which must be well known by this time to most intelligent buyers. But some of the most reputable dealers in the trade continue to do it, and take the risk of not being found out.

AS has been stated in these columns more than once, hardly an important piece of really *old* carved English furniture which has not been doctored is to be found in any New York store, and yet hundreds of sideboards, cabinets, and wardrobes are sold there as such every week in the season. These shams used to come almost entirely from Chester, where a man named Sherritt has a factory for producing them, and turns them out by the hundred with the most delightfully deceptive chips, cracks and worm-holes—the latter are usually put in with a shotgun as the finishing touch. Now, however, counterfeits equally good (or bad) are made by some of the New York dealers themselves. One has a factory in Newport, where he makes a prodigious quantity of these things. Indeed, the "solid old English oak table" referred to above, I understand, is in the hospital ward there at the present moment, undergoing a course of treatment to make it more fit to stand the rigors of the trying climate of Rhode Island. MONTEZUMA.